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Finnish Teachers Making Sense and Promoting Multiliteracies in Early Years Education

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Abstract

In this chapter we explore how Finnish early years teachers use and make sense of the materials developed by the MOI program for promoting young children's multiliteracies. In specific, the chapter focuses on the teachers' use of *Whisper of the Spirit* which consist of open source, open ended, and non-prescriptive activity cards. All of the four teachers were chosen for this study because of their interest in development of multiliteracies pedagogy. In our chapter, we ask how do these teachers promote children's multiliteracy learning through versatile play, digital production and multimodal practices through the MOI-material and how is the use of the MOI-material adapted by teachers in local contexts. In this respect, we hence look into the teachers' agency in designing and conducting multiliteracy pedagogy, which we consider to be connected to autonomy, one of the four key elements of the Finnish teacher profession, and through that in transformative agency which emerged in the teachers' narrations. The chapter is structured around four teachers' semi-structured interviews and shows how the teachers made sense of the MOI-material in their efforts to promote young children's multiliteracies, and how they applied the materials in their teaching in local contexts. Opportunities and challenges will be identified and discussed.

Keywords: Multiliteracy; Early childhood education; Teachers' agency; Playful pedagogy; Digital production

Introduction

How can teachers promote multiliteracy in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) if the concept of multiliteracy is not definite and distinct for the teachers? As described in the introduction to this volume, in the Finnish context of early childhood education, the value and the concept of multiliteracy were introduced through the new National Core Curriculum of ECEC (2016) as one of the transversal competences, and not all teachers were naturally or automatically familiar with the term. One way to demonstrate the novel concepts and pedagogies for the early years practitioners is

to articulate them in teaching materials. In this chapter we will discuss teachers' autonomy and pedagogical freedom in promoting multiliteracy – a loose concept with a wide pedagogical horizon.

We explored how four Finnish teachers, interested in designing multiliteracy pedagogy, used the pedagogical material *Whisper of the Spirit* (Erfving et al., 2017) and found it particularly useful and inspiring for multiliteracy teaching purposes. The material is developed by the MOI program for promoting young children's multiliteracies. The Finnish National Agency of Education (EDUFI) defines multiliteracy as "a core competence from the viewpoint of interaction and understanding culturally diverse messages and the surrounding world." The description follows The New London Group's definition of multiliteracy as a concept needed in this multifaceted society (New London Group, 1996). *Whisper of the Spirit* (Erfving et al., 2017) has been developed following these guidelines. In the Finnish national context teachers are given agency – especially autonomy and trust which Paronen & Lappi (2018) - by society to design their teaching by following a non-prescriptive curriculum. Because of the teachers' own education, they are trusted to transform the curriculum and their chosen pedagogical materials into activities which take into account the local context. Teachers' autonomy and their freedom to innovate within teaching processes, and the opportunities teachers have to explore what works in their practice, stems from the accommodating and always evolving Finnish Education System. (Toom & Husu, 2016).

In this chapter we ask how the teachers narrate their independent promotion of multiliteracy - a new concept in the Finnish curriculum - learning through children's versatile play, digital production and multimodal productions all developed from the MOI-material. Additionally, we describe how the pedagogical material is adapted to local contexts. The freely available, open pedagogical material is produced in a digital form, with the aim of promoting multiliteracies and enhancing children's interest in Finnish culture, nature and ancient beliefs from a variety of perspectives. In this study 'open' learning material refers to learning materials which are free for anyone to use. Open also refers to the idea of the material's being open to versatile use and adaptation instead of being prescriptive as in the Finnish context teachers have the autonomy to choose the learning materials they justify to be the best material for the group of children they are teaching. We argue that such open tasks and materials encourage teachers to develop and implement multiliteracy pedagogy within early childhood education curriculum and this can support teachers' agency and autonomy.

The Early Years Pedagogy of Multiliteracy

The concept of multiliteracy was introduced as a cross-curricular competence in the new curriculum of Finnish education from ECEC to secondary education between the educational reform process during years 2014-2016 (Välijärvi & Sulkunen, 2016). The concept aimed to support communication, interaction, interpretation, design, and production, with a view of developing children's competences and agency underpinned by the belief that for children to be members of society they need not only be receivers of knowledge, but interpreters and creators of new meanings. Teachers are challenged to develop implement pedagogical methods to support children to become active agents of their learning, and create shared learning experiences with children to support such principles (Välijärvi & Sulkunen, 2016; Kangas, 2016).

In the Finnish educational context playful learning is highly valued approach where children's natural way of acting, and exploring and understanding the world are emphasized (see Kumpulainen & Sefton-Green, 2014; Sintonen, Ohls, Kumpulainen, Lipponen, 2015). In this approach teachers play an important role in taking account of children's initiative and further promote them as part of the joint meaning making process. For example, Moller (2015) has found that in play scenarios childrens' meaning making was conjured by communication and transgressive acts with adults, who created opportunities to reestablish the play scenarios as joint experiences. In this approach imagination is an essential working tool, but also a state of mind where learning is understood in terms of creativity and joint meaning-making processes (Sefton-Green et al. 2015). Vygotsky (1990) has defined that thinking skills manifest either through adaptation or assimilation, whereas new cultural reproduction is created through imagination. While playing children are interpreting and reproducing the existing culture and social structures (see also Corsaro, 2011). In educational contexts, imagination shapes the learning as meaningful and productive process where children participate in the society and the world around them (Vygotsky, 1990; Thomas & Seely Brown, 2011). However, imagination needs resources and room to develop; In Finnish early childhood education playful learning and self-initiated play have been seen to have important role for children's holistic learning (see Sefton-Green & al. 2015; Pramling Samuelson and Asplund Carlson, 2008), and children's play is highly valued.

Another important feature in Finnish early years education and pedagogy is the promotion of children's agency and participation (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2017, 2016; Kangas 2016; Sairanen & Kumpulainen 2014). Young children's participation in educational settings is enhanced when children's agency is considered and taken account. Participation in learning emerges through experiences of joy and motivation that support the metacognitive learning skills and shared learning experiences through social interaction and shared meaning making. (Kronqvist

and Kumpulainen 2011). This requires that teachers are focused to facilitate children's participation and agency (see Kangas, 2016; Pramling-Samuelsson & Asplund Carlson, 2008) and that teachers are aware of children's perspective and children's life worlds (Nyland, 2009), and include multimodal practices in their pedagogical design.

Finnish National Core Curriculum (2016) describes pedagogy as “systematic and goal-oriented activities based on multidisciplinary knowledge, particularly in the fields of educational sciences and early childhood education, that are professionally managed and implemented by professional personnel aiming to support children's well-being and learning” (EDUFI, 2017). In early childhood and pre-primary education teachers use MOI's multiliteracy materials as a resource for creating opportunities for playful and participatory learning. The material is created true to the new Finnish ECEC core curriculum and true the concept of multiliteracy in the curriculum. In addition to systematic and goal-oriented activities multiliteracy pedagogy can be viewed as a dynamic process where the children draw on the culture of their society, its practices and values through active meaning making (Kumpulainen et al., 2009). *Whisper of the Spirit* is a set of activity cards with the playful educational aim of encouraging children to imagine, to observe, to collaborate, to participate, to reflect, to innovate, and to experiment in various multimodal ways and take an interest in Finnish nature and ancient myths.

Teacher's Agency is Dependent on the National Context

National education policy guides educational activities at all levels of the Finnish education system, including ECEC (Education and Research 2011–2016, 2012). The curriculum is built on a holistic view of children's growth, development, and learning, including pedagogical knowledge, cross-disciplinary information, and pedagogical expertise (Kangas, Ojala & Venninen, 2015). The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2017, 31) states “The kindergarten teacher bears the overall responsibility for planning the activities for the group of children, the implementation of activities with a goal-oriented and systematic approach as well as the assessment and development of the activities:”. Kindergarten teachers thus need knowledge of the concept of multiliteracy in addition to their authority to design and transform the new information into pedagogical activities. Our chapter defines thus teacher's agency as an ability to autonomously interpret and implement, negotiate and re-negotiate descriptive concepts in to their pedagogical design and teaching practices, following sociocultural theories. (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rajala & Kumpulainen, 2017.) Our study

shows that teachers' pedagogical practices, the materials they choose to use and implement, and their teaching all meaningfully promote young children's multiliteracy.

In Finland, the teaching profession is valued and respected (Paronen & Lappi, 2018). Finnish early childhood education teachers have a bachelor's degree or equivalent ECEC teacher degree. Pre-service teacher education consists theoretical and practical pedagogy studies and the education program is based on research (Education and Research 2011–2016, 2012). As a field of university education teacher education programs attract students and they are highly popular. One reason for the success is the important feature of the teacher's job - its autonomous nature and a trust by society to work without prescriptive guidelines. Teacher's autonomy refers to the freedom to choose pedagogy, learning materials and tools, freedom to decide on assessment and possibility to take part in creating the local curriculum. In the Finnish ECEC children are not tested at all and the assessment focuses on the pedagogical work, not on the child. Teachers are trusted and they work without any inspectorial systems. Teacher working conditions are also good, they have for example a possibility for continuing professional development in their work. (Kumpulainen, 2018; Paronen & Lappi, 2018; Toom & Husu, 2016.)

In the Nordic early childhood education, the world of young children in an early educational context is full of doing, acting and learning in interaction with both peers and educators (Kangas, 2016; Kangas, Ojala & Venninen, 2015). Emilson & Johansson (2009) state that children cannot experience agency nor participation by choice if teachers fail to enhance the opportunities for them to participate. However, Bae (2010) has stated that only through playful activities children have opportunities to experience true participation in their everyday activities. Almqvist and Almqvist (2015) have discovered that teachers are more directive than responsive when interacting with children which leads to lower engagement and fewer changes of exploration by the children. This requires sensitivity and willingness to adopt children's perspectives (see also Emilson & Folkesson, 2006). Active interaction and development of pedagogical practices have been considered important issues to support children's participation. (see Kangas, 2016). To consider children's initiatives and shared meaning making process in teaching requires however that teachers can hardly use ready-made learning materials or follow teachers' guidelines as such. Teachers need to create materials together with children and evaluate the ongoing learning process and use reflective practices for evaluation (Ojala & Venninen, 2011).

In this context teachers act autonomously, evaluating and reflecting on the learning environment and materials by themselves and with the children, and are trusted and only lightly steered by the curriculum framework. Teachers take responsibility when making the decisions if the material is suitable into the group of children's activities and if it responds to learning objectives set by the curriculum and teaching objectives set by the teacher. In ECEC centers, teachers are mainly responsible for pedagogical instructions and curriculum delivery. When needing new knowledge or practices to be implemented in their everyday pedagogical work teachers are able to attend in-service training by e.g. municipalities, universities or private providers. (Kumpulainen, 2018; Early Childhood Education and Care Act, 540/2018). In general the Finnish context for the daily early education includes both teacher's guided and children's self-initiated activities indoors, outdoors and outside the ECEC center. Finally, as a core principle it should be noted that children's relationship with nature is highly valued and their sustainable knowledge about environment is promoted. (EDUFI, 2017).

Teachers' transformative agency plays an important role when designing multiliteracy activities. By transformative agency in teaching multiliteracy in early years we mean the teacher's ability to steer the activities in the direction where young learners are able to take part and where their understanding of multiliteracy will be enhanced (see Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Virkkunen 2006). The Finnish curriculum (national and municipal) are frameworks and give only a basis for pedagogical design. (Kumpulainen, 2018). Multiliteracy as a transversal skill in the ECEC curriculum seeks teachers' agency when the concept of multiliteracy is multifaceted and the curriculum states only slightly how it should be taught. The interaction in the classroom is framed by the culture of the ECEC center and the classroom, including the curriculum and the learning materials used by the teacher (see Rajala, Kumpulainen, Rainio, Hilppö, Lipponen, 2016). This interaction defines teacher's action, autonomy, and agency although it works another way around too. Agency defines teacher's action and activity in the variable and complex situations with different children and different learners who are all perceived individually (EDUFI, 2017). Teachers handle versatile situations with a group of different learners and at the same time because with only a framework the teacher is constantly designing the pedagogy. The nature of agency is various depending on the time and the space and it is constantly developing between the individual and the context (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011).

The Research Setting

Our study had the following objectives: a) to identify how four expert teachers in pedagogy of multiliteracy locally use the MOI material and promote children's multiliteracy learning through versatile play, digital production and multimodal producing and b) how teachers' agency manifest itself when the MOI-material is adapted in the local contexts.

The pedagogical material *Whisper of the Spirit* (Erfving et al. 2017) is a set of activity cards with the educational aim of encouraging children to exercise their imagination and take an interest in Finnish nature and ancient myths from a variety of perspectives and modalities. Myths and cultural beliefs are shared stories about entities, events and places no one has seen or experienced but which are nonetheless held to be true in Finnish culture in the far past. Additionally, the activity cards encourage children to go outdoors to observe and document the nature, to use sense of smell in the forest or start a pretend play with the peer group, just to mention few. In this study, the pedagogical activities teachers have voluntarily and autonomously developed and designed around the *Whisper of the Spirit* (see figure 1) connect hands-on activities to digital production, documentation and remixing. Some teachers followed the material more strictly and some of them used the material to get ideas to develop their own ideas further.

Insert fig 1 around here

Our study concentrates on four teachers - two early childhood education teachers Saara and Helena and two pre-primary teachers Alma and Susanna. The pre-selected teachers had an interest in using the MOI-materials and they had also used *Whisper of the Spirit* in their teaching. All of the teachers in this study worked in ECEC centres which were located in the urban or semi-urban area of southern Finland's metropolitan area surrounded by blocks of flats, detached houses and park-like nature. Overall all of the teachers' classes consisted of children from 3 to 7-year-old children including children from diverse language backgrounds.

Research Methods

This case study has a qualitative research synthesis (Patton, 2015) approach based on interview data in order to describe teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and to support analysis of children's multiliteracy and teachers' agency. The data collection were recorded because we were especially interested how teachers with an interest of multiliteracy would use the MOI-material and how they used it in their teaching. We handled a process of several stages during our data collection. The interview method used here was a combination of open-ended interview and guided approach which

allowed individual perspectives and experiences to emerge (see Patton, 2015). The dedicated teachers - as key experts (see Libakova & Sertakova, 2015) in early childhood education and care because of their education and experience in the work - were interviewed individually in semi-structured interviews. Three of the interviews took place in the ECEC centres where the teachers worked and in one case the interview was conducted online. Three of the teachers enriched their narration with visual narration (see Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014) by showing and reflecting on the children outputs during the learning activities.

The transcribed interview data were analysed inductively (e.g. Patton 2002; Thomas 2006) and we used thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps. After familiarizing ourselves with the data, we decided to concentrate on every teacher's narration at a time. In the second phase of our analysis we generated and identified initial themes which raised inquiries from the individual teacher's narrations and formed them as a whole. We then analyzed the whole data set as one and identified the themes of teacher's local usage of the material and how it is connected to the development of children's multiliteracy. In the third phase we identified the teacher's sense of agency which manifested itself in the teacher's narrations when they described designing, conducting and assessing their teaching and pedagogical decisions. After these steps, we reviewed the data and discussed and assimilated our findings. These vignettes are written to illuminate the teachers' pedagogical thinking and agentive orientations rather than give the representative information of all the pedagogical activities.

Results

In this chapter, we are focusing on how four experienced Finnish teachers used and made sense of the MOI-material developed for promoting young children's multiliteracies, and how the teachers' agency manifested itself in designing and conducting multiliteracy pedagogy. The MOI-material is designed and published to promote the making teaching of multiliteracy a responsibility for all teachers (Välijärvi & Sulkunen, 2016) in the work of ECEC teachers. The material itself does not teach multiliteracy or give simple assignments for classroom use. It aims to act as meaning makers between curriculum and teachers' professional skills and knowledge. The following vignettes describe four teachers' multiliteracy interpretations and development of the early education group learning processes with the aim of promoting multiliteracy.

Vignette 1: From Inspiration to the Imaginary World

In the first vignette, in a multicultural group of five years old children, Saara decided to introduce the world of spirits and ancient beliefs to the children through story, play and imagination. Saara believed that multiliteracy is best enhanced through utilizing children's natural curiosity of various issues and their explanations. She used art based activities in her teaching and connected them also to the development of children's multiliteracy. The project began by writing an inspirational email. The email was sent to children by a "good spirit" living in a forest near the kindergarten, and the email contained an invitation for a party at her home. Saara encouraged children to start looking for the good spirit and gently guided the children to the imaginary world of *Whisper of the Spirit*. Children were very eager to create their own storyworld around the good spirit; they created a home for her, developed a fairy's flying school and used Pokemon Go for fairy hunting (children taught fairies to play Pokemon Go). Saara found that *Whisper of the Spirit* sparked her creativity in designing their activities for children. The process grew and progressed during one semester. Saara was very open to children's own initiatives and allowed them to continue the story which they collaboratively created and shared. The learning process around *Whisper of the Spirit* involved children's designed arts and crafts activities, for example a chandelier for a spirit (see figure 2), and children's own storytelling. Saara observed and reflected that the whole process was a flow experience for the children because they were continuously willing to continue by returning to it and evolving it. She documented the different phases of the process and together with the children edited and published a flyer for parents at the end of the semester.

Insert fig 2 around here

In this vignette Saara encouraged children to partake in versatile play using a series of playful methods and to spark children's. It showed that *Whisper of the Spirit* was a starting point for the learning process which consisted of playful and multimodal activities to spark children's imagination and to experience multiliteracy activities. Saara personalized her own teaching by starting the process with adult-led activities. As the project went on Saara gave agency to children. She felt important that children took part in the design of the process and created the context with children by allowing them to show their own ideas of the content and of the working methods. Saara evolved the process and used the learning material in the way that children would be motivated in the learning process by playful activities and rich storytelling and by inviting children to use their imagination. Saara appreciated and valued children's participation and children's choices were strongly emphasized.

Saara's transformative agency can be seen in her decisions to use arts in her teaching. Her interest in arts and autonomous thinking how arts are an effective way to teach multiliteracies effects in the children's activities. The project continued for one semester with versatile learning activities which were leaded by both the teacher and the children.

Vignette 2: The Speaking Rock and Other Digital Stories

In the second vignette Alma, the teacher, decided that her class would pack their backpacks and go to the forest nearby. Alma and the children packed a digital camera with them – an idea Alma got from *Whisper of the Spirit*. They visited the forest several times and they always had the camera with them so that children had opportunities to take photos in places which they felt were interesting and of figures that aroused their attention. Alma and the children started to work with the photos they had taken from the trips to the forest using one application where user can draw a mouth on the picture (see figure 3). With the help of an application, children added talking mouths to their digital photos and recorded speech with the talking mouth. This idea came from Alma, who shared her own creation, a video of a talking rock, with the children. The rock was asking: "Would you like to hear my story?". According to her, this particular lesson component inspired children to create their own stories with talking rocks, branches and stones. As the process went on children created digital stories, they oriented in the forest (*Google Map*) and did digital drawing. The whole learning process which started from *Whisper of the Spirit* lasted several weeks, and Alma collected all the children's digital creations for a digital online collage (*ThingLink*) to share with their parents and with their peers in the ECEC center. The ThingLink collage included children's digital photos, digital animations, scanned drawings, videos, children's interviews and map (and some other online links). Alma's idea of bringing all the process elements to the digital collage was pedagogically a wise thing. Through the collage she managed to bundle all the content and phases of their learning process in the form of non-linear, interactive digital canvas. The collage demonstrated to the children the repertoire of multiliteracy acts which were occurred during the process, and it helped them to assemble their own narration of *Whisper of the Spirit*.

Insert fig 3 around here

Whisper of the Spirit was only a starting point for Alma's creativity as she designed these activities. She noticed that children started to create their own stories and content from her introduction and that they were motivated to learn more. She realized that children were excited to use their own photos and motivated to continue the activities during the learning process. Alma had autonomy to design

her teaching practices so that she was able to show different applications to children and teach children to use the applications. The curriculum does not state how digital devices should be used hence Alma was not forced by the curriculum to use specific methods or materials, but she was able to observe the children and use methods to motivate children to learn more. Her ability to use her creativity as a pedagogical designer during the process built on expertise which has grown during the time she had been a teacher. Her basic teacher-training did provide basic skills to teach multiliteracies and digital creation but as in Alma's case it required additional professional competence.

Vignette 3: Meaning Making and Creativity in the Forest

In the third vignette the children's cooperative learning was started by pre-primary teacher Susanna and carried out by herself together with other primary school teachers. In this project, pre-school children and primary school children worked together and they co-created meanings in versatile learning environments, mainly in the forest nearby, through multimodal approaches. They had a variety of learning activities with digital devices during the project: taking photos and making movies, crafting, creating animations, singing and music, storytelling and playing games. *Whisper of the Spirit* inspired Susanna when she and her colleagues designed the learning project and she followed the material as a framework when designing the pedagogical activities to promote children's multiliteracy. The learning environment in this project was wide when children worked in the pre-primary center, in the primary school and especially outdoors. Playful methods included drama playing where both children and teachers were involved. The conclusion of the project was a dialogic classroom activity, where children and teacher explained their conceptions about Finland as their home country.

The third vignette showed how Susanna designed multiliteracy learning activities emphasizing multimodal working methods in cooperation with other teachers. She had enhanced her knowledge of multimodal working methods and especially digital creation during previous years and through that she had already knowledge about digital production and multiliteracy, although multiliteracy was added to the curriculum only recently. *Whisper of the Spirit* guided her pedagogical design through the whole process. She emphasised that a learning material which arouses children's imagination and guides teacher lightly but not prescriptively is valuable when enhancing children's multiliteracy. Susanna's transformative agency manifests itself in her thinking when she balanced with the content of the ready-made material and her and her colleagues independently designed pedagogical content. During the learning process Susanna cooperated closely with other teachers by discussing, taking advices, negotiating and organizing learning environment to the children of various ages and taking

account the children's initiatives and ideas as well. She was the lead teacher in this project and maintained the cooperation and the outlines of the project. Versatile multimodal learning activities and the use of technology were natural part of learning multiliteracies. Creativity and playfulness were strongly emphasized within the project and the process of creativity was ongoing. The activities around creative work continued through different assignment during the project, the children for example crafted architectural designs for the spirits houses using only natural materials. The usage of time became challenging. By the end of the project Susanna had to do some parts only by herself without children taking part on it. When time was running out she decided to edit children's movies into one clip so that children would have time to finalise their movies. Susanna described her enthusiasm towards the material and how she created ideas of working through playful approach outdoors.

Vignette 4: Spirits of Everything

The fourth vignette is from a kindergarten group of children from three to five years where the group of 8 five-year-old children started a digital creation project with a topic of nature and ancient Finnish myths. Helena, their teacher, had been thinking how to teach multiliteracies, because it was a new concept in the curriculum, and came up with an idea of enhancing multiliteracies through animations – a technique she leant at in-service training. Helena was introduced to *Whisper of the Spirit* by another ECEC teacher, her colleague, specialized in teaching Finnish as another language, who had found the material from the internet. Helena began to glance through the material and started to develop an idea how she could use it in her own teaching. It became clear to her how to specifically implement the content of the material to fit into the content of children's activities. She was intrigued by the topic, Finnish myths and mythology especially their connections to nature, which she felt was important for children. The project started with an introduction to Finnish myths and ancient beliefs and after the introduction the children created their own spirits from modelling clay. During the semester they had had previous projects but the spirits children created were also from the stories and tales they had read before. Helena let children to create the spirits which had nothing to do with the nature and ancient beliefs but were clearly important to the children. They used learning environments inside and outside the ECEC centre and one environment was the forest. In the forest they tried to spot possible homes of the spirits and they took photos from them. They also collected wooden materials from the forest which they used as building blocks when creating the spirits' homes. Eventually the children created digital and paperback stories and animations from the fairies and the nature.

This vignette shows how the MOI-material inspired Helena to introduce Finnish myths to children and encourage children to experience nature and create and enhance their relationship to nature. The project concentrated on the digital producing, literacy and storytelling. The design of the activities encouraged children to learn a new vocabulary as some of the children were just begun to learn to speak Finnish. In national ECEC context, children's development and learning are observed but not assessed. Helena observed children's vocabulary and multiliteracy skills and reflected that the activities they had conducted got children interested in storytelling and multimodal creation and through that they learned new skills.

Helena started the design and as the project went on, the children steered the project to another direction beyond the general goals of the initial project. Helena noticed that the children connected this project to their culture in general by creating spirits (see figure 4) from digital media outside the ECEC centre, e.g. movies, and from previous experiences, e.g. a previous project they had had from flying and airplanes. She decided not to interfere in the children's creation but on the contrary encouraged children to take lead in this so that the children had the opportunity to be leading agents in their own learning. She realized that children were motivated to take part when they could create the spirits which they wanted to create. After the project Helena reflected that she could have involved children more in the planning. The curriculum instructs teachers to take children's ideas and initiatives into account during the learning process but she felt that she did not succeed in that as well as she would have wanted to. She also felt that she should have concentrated more on children's initiatives and take them account during the project more systematically.

Insert fig 4 around here

Conclusions

In our study we have concentrated on how playful learning approaches, that is versatile play, multimodal activities and digital producing, arise from the teachers' accounts of the children's learning. The results show that the teachers found the MOI-material (*Whisper of the Spirit*) useful and purposeful for promoting young children's multiliteracies, and they were applying the same material in various and unique ways across their teaching. Teachers used the material as content in their pedagogical design and teaching. The material stimulated the teachers' imagination and was a starting point for the pedagogical design of activities which aims to enhance multiliteracy. The teachers recognized that children's interest and curiosity towards nature and ancient beliefs developed

as the result of the activities, their ability to imagine and produce meaningful multimodal content, and to take advantage of material affordances of their own learning environment during the learning processes. Teachers evaluated and reflected on their pedagogical activities and designed them so that children were interested to take part in the activities, and that children had opportunities to take part in the activities and produce content. The teachers were also able to embed their teaching objectives into these projects where they emphasized and connected especially digital creation to multiliteracy.

The study shows how an agentic teacher is able to be a meaning-maker between a learning material - which offers instructions or a framework to teach multiliteracy - and curriculum. The different ways to execute teaching portrays teachers' pedagogical thinking and agency. Teachers in our study achieved transformative agency when implementing *Whisper of the Spirit* into their pedagogical design and teaching in different ways and when creating the context by themselves. This underscores teachers' aspirations to personalize their teaching into the local context including children's initiatives and ideas. Finnish teachers are not forced only to deliver the curriculum, but on the contrary the demand is to adapt the curriculum into the local context which contains a group of individual children with different interests and different backgrounds and cultures (see EDUFI, 2017). Teachers paid attention to different children and shaped their teaching so that every child would be involved into the learning process. In Finnish ECEC pedagogy research it has been shown that through participatory approach, pedagogies can be designed as involving, interactive and promoting shared meaning-making (Kangas 2016). Finnish teachers have capability to apply the information and design qualitative learning activities and evaluate them. Teacher's work seeks for creative thinking. Teachers had relational agency when they were able to involve children's own ideas and initiatives into the learning processes and even some parts of the process give children the leading possession.

Our study illuminated how Finnish teachers interpret and adapted the same material in different ways according to the local needs and affordances. They all have the same pedagogical target: to support the development of children's multiliteracy during the early years. Rubin (1989) suggests that teachers need pedagogical intelligence in variable situations in classroom where children and the context differ. We argue that learning and teaching multiliteracy needs different shareable applications and solutions. Multiliteracy as a concept is multiple and complex and the pedagogy of multiliteracy (New London Group, 1996; Mills, 2009) demands mastery of the concept. Today's various text environment with printed and digital texts, pictures, symbols and versatile information demands new pedagogical thinking and when the multimodal text environment is also part of the young children's lives, teachers in early childhood education need to have multiple tools to answer

this demand. As our study shows, teachers working with a curriculum which is implemented as a framework and includes non-prescriptive guidance, use variety of different teaching methods and learning activities. We believe that ECEC teachers' multiliteracy conceptualization is related to the nature of their agency.

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016 (2017) defines multiliteracy widely as a core competence to understand diverse messages and the world around us. The curriculum gives pedagogical instructions roughly about different types of literacies and texts and how to handle and produce these with children. Altogether it gives ECEC providers and teachers the freedom to define how to promote multiliteracy in the local context and to interpret what are the practices of pedagogy of multiliteracy. One question then is to ask what ECEC teachers' do when they are promoting multiliteracies. This study opens up local variation and shows how these teachers conducted a variety of pedagogical practices including playful multimodal activities where children could interpret and produce. Teachers emphasized digital production but also offered activities where children could produce without digital devices. Stories and tales were emphasized as well as children's imaginary play. Learning happened in learning environments inside and outside the ECEC centre.

Our study demonstrates how multiliteracy-based pedagogy also invited teachers to reflect on how their teaching approaches enables different sorts of learning, and how they can support "new forms of communication which are necessary to participate fully in our dynamic and culturally diverse society" (Mills 2009, 10). Multiliteracy can operate as the analytical lens that leads our attention to other areas where meanings emerge, beyond that of language. From a multiliteracy point of view, early childhood education should encompass a full range of such communicative settings, where children can use a variety of representative forms of expression and modes of meaning making with equal dignity and importance (see Eisner, 1994; Wong, 2001).

In this study we employed a sociocultural notion of agency where agency is defined as dependent on the context and the material resources in it (Gresalfi et al, 2009). We illustrated how the teachers' agency appeared in the teachers' narration and we have highlighted that these teachers had agency when designing and conducting their multiliteracy pedagogies. The teachers were not only delivering the curriculum but by making their own pedagogical choices designing the pedagogy so that the children's life worlds and natural way of acting (play), and other resources such as learning materials (Whisper of the Spirit) and the context (children's ideas) were taken account. It seems that a pedagogy

that is founded on an understanding of relationship between play and learning, and the role of teachers in facilitating both play and learning and being aware about their pedagogical choices, would appear beneficial for supporting children's learning (McInnes et al. 2011). Overall, our concluding thought is that pedagogical materials which are created to promote multiliteracy are useful to provide to teachers. If the materials are open enough, they will support teachers' intents of developing children's multiliteracy which strengthens teachers' perceptions of the multiliteracy concept and pedagogy.

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